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ABSTRACT

This booklet, designed for working parents, presents a step-by-step process for locating and making informed choices concerning child care alternatives. Included are suggestions for finding babysitters, child care centers, and family day care homes which satisfy extensive checklists of physical, social, emotional, and learning environment criteria. The checklists provide a means of evaluating the child care environment, staff-child relationships, and activities offered in each child care situation. In addition, suggestions are provided for: (1) contacting community child care resources, (2) budgeting for child care, (3) preparing the child for the child care center or family day care home, and (4) parent participation in the child care program. A list of additional reading resources for parents is also included. (BRT)

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CHOOSING CHILD CARE

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

by STEVANNE AUERBACH
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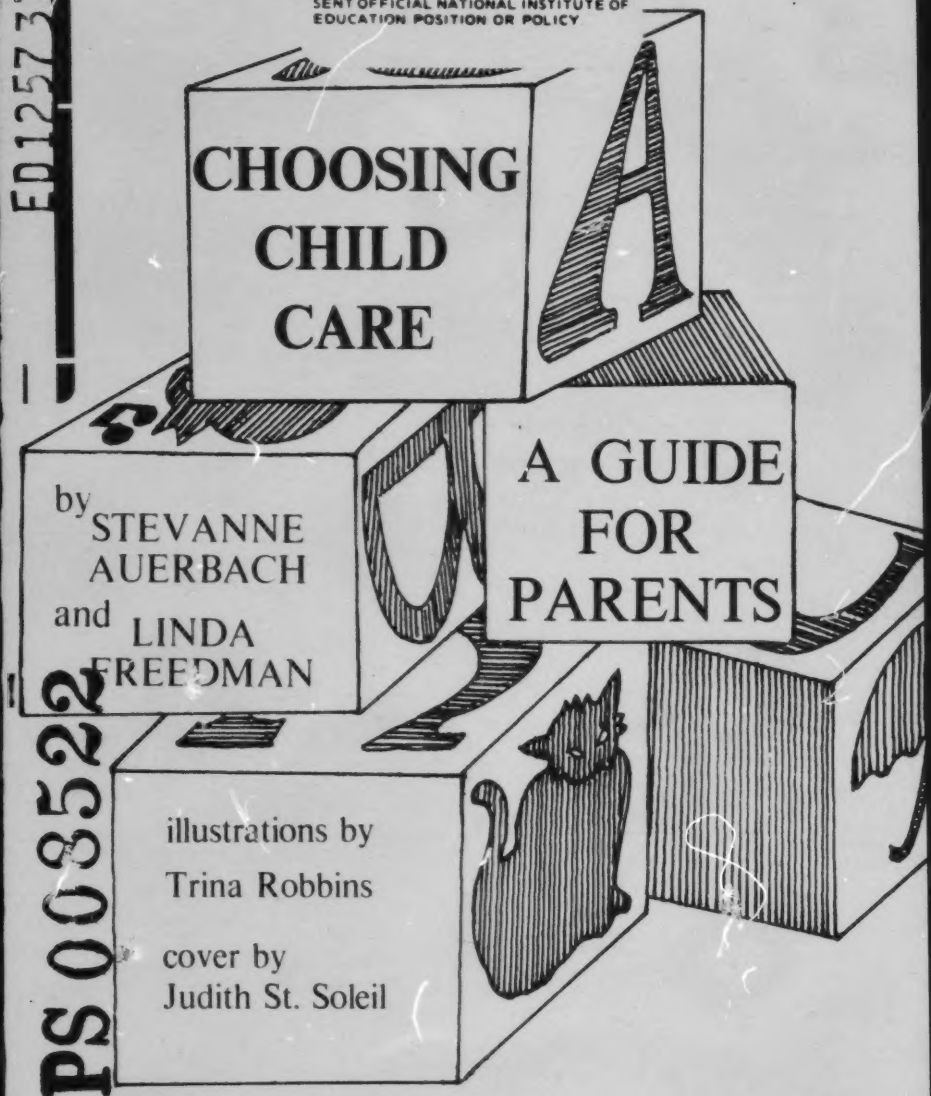

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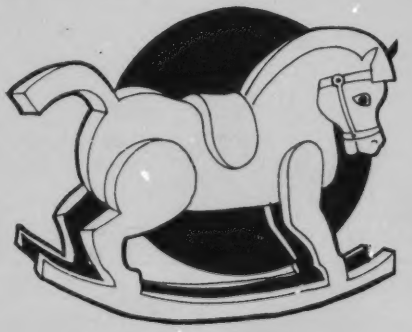

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Stevanne Auerbach, a working mother of four children, has completed her Ph.D. in Child Development. Her book PARENTS AND CHILD CARE, published at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, is a report on the needs and expectations parents have for child care services. She compiled and edited CHILD CARE: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE, published by Behavioral Publications. She currently reviews books for DAY CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION Magazine and is a consultant in child care.

Linda Freedman is also a working mother who balanced work, motherhood, and completing college. She is planning to bring together groups of working parents for informal discussions in which they can exchange information and experiences about child care and parenthood. She has worked in child care and for the San Francisco Childcare Switchboard.

Trina Robbins, the illustrator, also a cartoonist and feminist, has contributed to various comics, magazines, and other publications. She has participated in her own parent-operated playgroup.

Judith St. Soleil, cover designer, has recently illustrated two books, *Country Commune Cooking* and *Celery Wine*. She is also a mother of two children.

The authors and illustrators reside in San Francisco. PARENTS AND CHILD CARE RESOURCES is a collaborative nonprofit group of parents and professionals working to serve the child care community.

NOTE TO PARENTS

This booklet has been prepared for you as guide in selecting the best possible child care services. It includes discussions and checklists to make the search easier: the checklists give specific points to look for in the actual situations you visit; the discussion focuses on the kinds of questions parents ask at various stages of their search.

Many of you have chosen to or must work, but for others of you, the situation is not so clear-cut. For example, if you now receive Aid to Dependent Children or other public assistance, would you and your child really be better off financially and emotionally if you were to give this up? Or, if you want to supplement your family's income, would the net benefit to you, your child, and your family be worth the extra effort? What are the hidden expenses of various child care arrangements? This guide is directed toward the needs, problems, and choices faced by parents everywhere who work, attend school, or volunteer their services, and is intended to provide guidelines for single- or two-parent families who face exploring child care in their community.

In all, the booklet offers a realistic, step-by-step approach to choosing child care, whatever your family situation. The discussion is based on the view that you already are in the best position to decide which child care is best for your child. We hope the information and suggestions will reduce any feelings of uncertainty in selecting a child care situation.

Only you can make the final decision. It is a judgment based on the personal needs of both you and your child. As you look at the points mentioned in this guide, you will learn more about what you can expect from each kind of child care situation. You will also be better able to provide for your child through your more careful selection of the child care place. The checklists include what we consider 50 important aspects of any program, selected from among a great number of questions. You will have many of your own to add.

We hope that with this guide you will be able to find the best child care now available to you in your community. Millions of parents like yourself are working towards creating the best possible choices for all children. Above all, as you begin to look for child care, don't be afraid to trust your opinions and feelings, and those of your child. We would like to hear from you, and hope this guide will be useful.

Stevanne Auerbach
Linda Freedman

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Introduction

YOU AND YOUR CHILD AND THE WORLD OF WORK

Parents have much to share among themselves and rarely get the opportunity to talk over their concerns. The combination of work, parenthood, and caring for a child or several children is a delicate balance at best. The job requires all the ingenuity, skill, good humor, and strength one can muster. Sharing your experiences may be as helpful to you as it was to us when we discovered our common experiences, problems, and workable solutions. At least it may enable you to start to know what to look for.

We feel it may be useful for you to have the benefit of the discoveries we made as we faced the same problems of finding good child care arrangements for our own children. We hope this guide can shorten the length of time it takes you to find and decide upon the most suitable arrangement.

Millions of parents must return to employment, or want to return to school to further their education, or just need time to rest after their children are born. Some parents are fortunate to have a friend or a relative living nearby to assist them in caring for their child in an informal and inexpensive way. But most parents do not have a relative, friend, or neighbor to assist them. They have no alternative but to look elsewhere for child care.

The choices can be a caregiver in your home, in someone else's home, or in a child care center. However, finding a good and convenient sitter, home, or center is definitely not easy. Places that care for children may not be readily available and many are disappointing. Good programs usually have long waiting lists and may be inconvenient to reach from your home or cost more than you can afford – or they may not offer the kind of care you want. Most communities do not have enough good child care to meet the demand.

All parents seem to want the same thing for their children – a variety of child care places to choose from, with teaching styles that do not conflict with their lifestyle and point of view; a scale of fees based on their ability to pay; and safe, attractive facilities with a sensitive staff and that are well supplied with a variety of teaching materials, toys, and sturdy equipment.

For many parents the search for child care is only one of a number of difficult personal and family problems. Eager to resolve at least one nagging problem as soon as possible, many parents settle for the first child care arrangement available. The problems of an unsuitable or unsatisfactory child care arrangement can become as great an emotional and energy drain as finding child care in the first place, so it is well worth the time and effort to make a thorough investigation before you decide. The quick solution is no solution if your peace of mind must suffer.

Parents want child care services to have their children's well-being and development as their first goal, safe and pleasant places for infants and preschoolers, and convenient and flexible before and afterschool programs for school-age children. Parents want child care services that serve all families with respect and that offer a wide range of human services, such as health care.

Child care can be free or inexpensive for some parents in sponsored programs, or it can be very expensive. The programs may be provided by the local school system, by the federal government, by a nonprofit community agency or group, or by a college or university. In some cases employers or labor unions provide child care services for their employees.

The fees you will have to pay depend on a variety of factors, such as the source and amount of funding for the program, the size and location of the program, the number and kind of services available, the age of your child, and of course, your income. Recipients of AFDC, food stamps, or other public assistance face the problem of losing their eligibility for certain low-cost or free child care programs if they find a job. If you find yourself in this situation, only you can determine how this dilemma affect you and your child, and whether in the end it removes your incentive to seek employment.

If you are in the middle-income range, you should check with the Internal Revenue Service regarding income tax credits for expenses related to child care. The quality of child care you receive does not necessarily depend on the amount you have to pay. Other low-cost or free options will also be discussed later.

Situations vary, and you will again need to consider all of the possibilities before making a final choice.

Finding a situation where you and your child will be happy will likely take some time and effort, perhaps weeks of searching and visiting. Often, finding child care can be as complicated and stressful as finding a new place to live, and can take about the same amount of time and effort. We hope the discussion in this guide will shorten both the time and effort, and that you will find the information useful in exploring the questions you have as you begin on the path of finding quality child care.

After you have reviewed the guide, investigated what's available in your community, and visited a variety of different programs, you will be able to decide whether the benefits will pay off for you and your family.

Part One

CHOOSING THE BEST PLAN

KNOWING YOURSELF

You are now a parent or soon will be one. You are thinking about combining work or school with your family life. You wonder what effect that combination will have on your child. If you are thinking about working, you may be wondering what kinds of arrangements you can make for your infant or toddler. You may have many other questions. For example:

"What effects will working have on my child and me?"

"How much of my earnings will be left after child care and other work-related expenses?"

"Where can I find a well-qualified person or a good program for my child?"

"How much will I have to participate and become involved in the program?"

"How will illness – either of my child or myself – affect my employment?"

"How much time and energy will I have to balance everything?"

"WHAT EFFECT WILL WORKING HAVE ON MY CHILD AND ME?"

There is no reason to be concerned that just by being away from your child during the day there will be any harmful effects if you first take steps to prepare the child and yourself for the change. The combination of work and child-raising demands a lot of your energy and planning. You will have to arrange meals, housecleaning, and your personal needs carefully around the more limited time you will have. You also want to find time each day to be with your child to talk, play, read, and share with each other.

You may find that the demands placed upon you leave you little time or energy to become involved in other activities. You can only do what you can, so don't worry, and enjoy what you are able to do.

You have many more questions of course. These are just some of the concerns expressed by parents who are considering working or who have been working. There are no easy answers to these questions, especially since every parent brings his or her own special needs, motivations, and desires to the situation. This guide discusses many of these concerns with some specific solutions.

If you are going to be away from your child at any time of the day or night you will need child care; sitters, centers, and family day care homes are the basic choices. The number of specific places depends, of course, on where you live, on the number of available spaces for children, on the number of families who want the same services, and on your own luck in obtaining those services.

A friend or neighbor who has been able to look after your child may no longer be able to do this. Perhaps you are recently divorced and must return to work, or you want to complete your education, or maybe you want to volunteer your services in a community project. You may need child care whether or not you are employed, so the effort and expenses involved will be very important. You may want to have time away for yourself to take care of personal needs.

Sometimes, working outside the home may result in more problems if you have not weighed all of the alternatives carefully beforehand.

Ask yourself: "Do I have to work? If I do work, what kind of job and what hours? Will the extra expenses be more than I realized they would be? Can I combine the responsibilities and challenges of being a working parent?"

Whatever you are doing now or want to do is important to you as a person. You may be discovering new talents and abilities for the first time or you are seeking ways to gain new skills. Perhaps you worked before your child was born and now want to retrain and to update your skills. You may also want to balance all of the alternatives possible in your life to decide the advantages and disadvantages for you and your child.

The purpose of seeking employment or education is to find ways to live now and to provide for your child and yourself in the future. There are many possibilities. Different jobs require different skills and offer different challenges. Returning to school, working part-time, or staying at home are other choices. The problems are many in making ends meet, so finances are a serious reason for returning to employment. Perhaps you have not felt that you had any choices before. You do have choices if you check out what you really want, what is really available, and how much time will be involved. Then you must know what the costs and benefits are. The cost most often determines whether a parent seeks child care. Fees are determined by a number of factors, including the source and amount of funding, whether public or private; the income and eligibility requirements for families; and the number and kind of related support services provided by the program. You will have to consider many different, but related, things before you will know whether you can afford a specific child care arrangement. This is discussed in greater detail in the section on planning a workable budget.

Knowing what you want and need is very important. Child care services will make a big difference in giving you the chance to earn, go to school, or respond to other needs, and in providing an important opportunity for your child at the same time.

KNOWING YOUR CHILD

The first step in getting clear about your child's needs is thinking about his or her personality, special needs, and responses to other children or adults. Is your child ready to cope with the change from home to child care at this time? If not, you will want to assist your child in making the transition and by observing your child's development at this time. How would you describe your child?

Quiet?	Has had time with other adults?
Outgoing?	Enjoys a variety of activities?
Full of energy?	Responds to a new person openly?
Toilet trained?	Can be away from you comfortably?
Likes a variety of foods?	Enjoys playing with other children?
Enjoys meeting new people?	Feels good about himself or herself?
Is generally in good health?	Has special health or physical needs?

These are just a few of the kinds of questions to help you describe your child now and and decide what kind of place, program, and person he or she needs.

How will your child respond to a new situation away from home? Children's abilities to adjust to new situations vary greatly. The more you consider the needs of your child, the greater are your chances of working out the best arrangement. Give thought to the unique personality and responses of your child. Your child's needs are most important as you begin to think about the place you will select.

What the young child needs is a pleasant, happy, supportive place that helps him or her grow in all ways – mentally, physically, and socially. You will want to select a place that accepts and supports your child as he or she is now. Considering the

personality and needs of your child, his or her ability to adjust, and the possible different situations, you will have to match your child's needs to the best situation available.

An individual sitter or a home with only a few children is a good first step for those children who will be away from their parents for the first time or who will need some extra time to make the transition from home to child care. Some children have had many chances to be apart from their parents and can function well in larger groups of children. They would find a center with many children challenging and fun. They might want a change of playmates and the wider number of activities offered by a center. Most important, each parent must find the situation that most considers the individual needs and temperaments of his or her own children.

As you visit each place, ask yourself:

"How will my child fit in with this group of children?"

"How much individual attention does my child need?"

"Will my child be comfortable and secure in this place?"

"Who are the adults and how will they respond to the needs of my child?"

"How much does the place feel like home?"

"What will be expected of me?"

"What are the staff's attitudes and ideas about child-rearing?"

We will be discussing these questions and others in Part Four, when we talk about the checklists of things to look for at each place you visit. Knowing the special needs of your child will assist you in recognizing the place you really want when you go out to look.

Children usually adjust to the philosophy and methods of their child care programs if these do not contrast too sharply with what their parents do at home. What is most important to their well-being is how well their individual needs are being met.

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They need food for their mental and motor growth. Their happiness depends on the love and warmth in their environment. They need to be free of tension and fear and need a chance to try out their social wings in the environment they share with their new friends.

Of course, your child will learn new attitudes and pick up mannerisms common among the other children and adults in the center or home. Don't worry: these aren't necessarily permanent. Children grow and change rapidly. What is important is how you handle any conflicts of values that come up.

Be careful about the philosophy and methods of the place you're considering. You usually know when you walk into a place whether you like it or not. It has to do with your personal beliefs, opinions, and philosophy, and the kinds of values you feel are most important. You may want to consider a center or home where there are many opportunities to develop cultural identity and pride. Developing respect for one's own cultural values will give your child a strength that will provide security, confidence, and self-respect.

Children sense whether you like and feel comfortable in the place you're sending them to. But you shouldn't choose a center simply because it supports your philosophy. Just note what your own reaction is. Do you feel a warm response to and a real interest in you and your child? Focus on the business of considering the place from your child's point of view.

You know your child best. Consider your child and your own feelings about the place, the adults, and the other children. Most of all, trust your own feelings and judgments as to whether the staff has a warm, personal interest in you and your child.

Part Two

CHOOSING FROM WHAT IS AVAILABLE

KNOWING THE CHOICES

The choices of child care situations generally fall into three categories:

1. An individual **sitter** (in your home or the sitter's home)
2. A group **family day care home**
3. A **child care center** (in a classroom, church, or other building).

The type of program, services, and quality of these services will vary greatly. Before we discuss the details of the types of programs, we want to review some of the pros and cons of individual sitters, family day care homes, and child care centers. You will want to consider consistent-reliable-accessible-affordable services.

CONSISTENT. Will this be someone or a place you can count on to be able to take good care of your child, with a minimum of problems, offering the greatest variety of opportunities for your child?

RELIABLE. Will you be able to trust the sitter or child care staff with your child's safety and well-being, and will they be where you need them when you need them?

ACCESSIBLE. Will this be someone or a place you can get to without too much difficulty in terms of time, distance, and expense? Do the hours coincide with your schedule?

AFFORDABLE. Will this be someone or a place that will charge you no more than what you can reasonably manage within your budget?

Child care can be free for some in sponsored programs or it can be very expensive, depending on the number and ages of your children. The amount you have to pay does not always indicate the quality of the program, so don't assume a more expensive program is better than a less expensive or free program. Be sure to investigate such low-cost or free options as parent cooperatives and playgroups. Consult refereaces given at the conclusion of this guide about starting or joining cooperatives and playgroups. Situations vary and you will again need to consider all of the possibilities before making a final choice.

ABOUT SITTERS

A sitter is an individual who is hired to care for your child in your home or in the sitter's home during the day or evening. Sitters usually are paid by the hour or week. Federal law requires that sitters who work more than 90 hours a month receive a minimum wage of $2 per hour.

Sitters often tend to be an expensive choice. They are sometimes unreliable and usually, if very good, difficult to find. If you have more than two young children, it may be worthwhile to hire a sitter so the children can stay together in their own home. This would also save you extra transportation and costs. It is difficult to locate a good sitter who has training and experience with young children and is actually looking for a job.

To find a person who is kind and gentle and who knows how and when to respond to your child in a positive, direct, and interested way is not easy. People who take these jobs and who are well qualified are in high demand and earn high salaries. There may be a possibility of obtaining, sometimes on a part-time basis, the services of an elderly person, a retired teacher, a part-time student, or a relative. You may share the costs of hiring someone with another parent. Or you might also consider offering room and board in exchange for caregiving.

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If the sitter will be working without supervision in your home, the qualities of that person are critical. As a result, you must be very cautious. Check out references and previous experience, and take note of the personality of the person you are considering. Be careful at first to avoid any major disappointments or problems. Certain agencies can assist you in this regard, although they often are not as selective as they should be. Before an agency sends a prospective applicant to your home for the first interview, find out as much as possible from the person in the initial telephone conversation to avoid wasting time.

A child usually is unable to tell you how he or she feels about the sitter. Later you will have no other indicator but your sense of things when you go home or pick up your child at the sitter's home. Note your child's responses to the person and how the person responds to your child. A sitter is often a good alternative if that person is really interested in caring for the daily well-being of your child and does not view his or her responsibilities as "just another job." Also, it is important that the sitter share comments with you at the end of the day about your child's progress and any difficulties that arise. Taking this time is critical, as is establishing a good relationship with this person.

ABOUT THE FAMILY DAY CARE HOMES

Family day care is provided in homes set up to care for from two to twelve children.

A home setting organized specifically to care for children is the most frequent type of care outside the child's own home. People who want to take the responsibility to care for children arrange to modify their homes to fit the needs of a small group of infants, preschoolers, or school-age children.

The number of children in the home varies. The arrangement is often flexible, although laws typically require that no more than six children under 6 years old, including the provider's own children, or only two children under 2 years old be cared for in the home at the same time.

There are two basic kinds of family day care homes – small and large. A small home cares for six or fewer children, from infants through children of 6 years of age. A larger home can care for up to twelve children and requires that two adults be present. Regulations for family day care homes vary from state to state. In general, licensing regulations of these homes are

aimed at safeguarding the child's safety and health but do not always specify the educational or social aspects of the program. Licensed homes do give you some protection, but do not guarantee quality.

State licensing most often assures you that the home has met certain standards of health, safety, and physical conditions. Some of these standards require personal qualifications on the part of the provider. Nevertheless, a license does not assure you that the services provided will be satisfactory to you and your child. Sometimes a home is not licensed because the standards require the home to have expensive alterations which cannot be covered by the provider alone. Ask to see the license and note the last time it was certified by a visit from the licensing agency. If the place is not licensed, ask why.

Be very careful if you must consider an unlicensed place. The standards have been set up to protect the best interests of children with the highest quality possible, and not having a license may indicate a serious deficiency not immediately apparent. In Part Four is a list of specific things to look for when you visit a family day care home.

If your child is already in kindergarten or the primary grades, he or she may be cared for and supervised before and after school in this home. If you have a preschooler, the child may be with other 2- to 4-year-old children. The advantages are many. Your child needs to play with other children of the same age. Again, the quality of the care your child receives will depend on the person you select, the type of home, and the experiences your child is provided each day.

A family day care home has many advantages. A home-like atmosphere may be more convenient and comfortable than a center. If your child needs the warmth and closeness of a small group of children, a family day care home can provide this. Also, a home may be willing to care for a moderately ill child, whereas a larger center may exclude the child, forcing you to stay home and lose a day of work or classes. Homes also offer some other very special advantages such as close personal attention, a comfortable space, and familiar people and surroundings every day.

Disadvantages of a family day care home include the following:

1. The children may not be as closely supervised as they would be by the staff in a center.

2. The provider may not be able to offer the variety of activities or materials a center may have.

3. The children may be allowed to watch television too much.

4. If the provider becomes ill, you may have to make other child care arrangements on very short notice.

5. Children in single-family day care homes are not exposed to the variety of adults available to children in child care centers.

ABOUT CENTERS

Centers are places where child care is provided to children in groups of from 10 to 100. Some centers offer child care for both infants and preschoolers. Most provide care for preschoolers only; others include afterschool care also. As well as depending on the number of children you have and their needs and yours, your selection of a center will also depend on what is available and how you feel about the place and the staff after your visit. The checklists will assist you in knowing what to look for during your first visit of inquiry. (See Part Four).

Centers are located in a wide variety of places – in schools, churches, recreation centers, or in separate buildings. They usually have outdoor play space or a park nearby. They may provide breakfast and include lunch and snacks. Nap and rest times are balanced with play and educational opportunities. The children usually have a wider variety of activities, materials, and play equipment than they would find in a family day care home. The staff are usually trained and knowledgeable. The hours the center is open usually will coincide with your work schedule. Centers offer very reliable care. They vary according to the staff, the sponsor, and the parents involved. If your child attends school and is under age 12, you can find a center or home that offers afterschool care, supervision, and activities.

Centers have disadvantages too: they may be expensive, or charge more than you can afford, or be difficult to reach from where you live. They may have too many children and not be able to offer each child the complete individual attention of a sitter or single-child home. They also may not be able to care for more than one child from a family.

If your work hours are not during the day, then a home or sitter willing to provide evening care may be your only choice. This problem is especially acute for nurses and other workers who have evening or night shifts. Hospitals are increasingly offering child care services inside or nearby to respond to this need. If you think the organization which has hired you could provide or assist with child care serivces, find the appropriate people to talk to and suggest that they do this. Sometimes you might want to join a group of other persons who are interested in and advocate better child care services.

You will have more information after your telephone conversations and personal visits to child care centers.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES

Other arrangements for child care exist and are worth considering. Some of these arrangements offer a solution that can meet everybody's needs. However, most of the alternatives will require more of your involvement and attention on an ongoing basis to make them work. If you can balance the time and conditions regarding your participation, you could have an excellent arrangement.

PLAYGROUPS are one of the possibilities for a good arrangement. Playgroups are informal cooperatives operated and organized entirely by parents.

Playgroups are often the only available and inexpensive child care provision for infants and toddlers. The groups can work on a rotating-home basis, which works well if no more than five children are in the group and are together for only a few hours each day. Sometimes it is advisable to start a playgroup by exchanging with one other person once a week and including other parents and children into the playgroup gradually.

Parents have organized playgroups that provide care for as many as 20 children and typically hire a teacher to work with all of the parents. The teacher can provide skill, direction, and continuity to the group. It can be arranged that the group meet with the teacher in the same place each day, with services provided for more hours to more children. Hiring a regular teacher is often essential to large-playgroup management.

One disadvantage of playgroups is the additional time and responsibility involved. If you have more than one child and must place your children in different groups because of their ages, coordinating your work days and scheduling playgroup time can quickly become complicated. It is the parents' organizational abilities and available time that keep a playgroup running smoothly. Playgroup days are often upset when parents can't show up as scheduled, and the whole group must readjust immediately. Problems such as deciding who is going to be responsible really slow down group meetings.

The other major problem with playgroups is that sometimes the parents are at a loss for what to do with the children during playgroup time. A playgroup means parents learning and working together. Sharing skills and creative energy to provide a flow of good activity for young children during the day and learning the best ways to handle discipline problems that come up give parents an opportunity to gain new information.

Groups deal with these problems and are more or less successful. By visiting an established playgroup, you can get an idea of whether the playgroup will be suitable for you. Arrange to attend one of these group meetings for more direct information, a feeling about how it operates, and to find out what the other parents are like. For the steps necessary to begin organizing this type of arrangement, we suggest you read *Playgroups: Do It Ourselves Child Care,* mentioned in the References at the back of this guide.

PART-DAY PROGRAMS FOR PRESCHOOLERS are a good alternative for children ages 2 to 4 because they are readily available. Half-day programs run either mornings or afternoons. They vary in cost depending on the sponsoring group. Some are parent cooperatives with hired teachers and parents assisting in providing the program. Usually the staff is professional.

For many years half-day programs have been recognized for the positive contributions they can make to children's early development. They have been the most typical out-of-the-home child care and early education experience. Now, in response to the needs of working parents, some half-day programs are extending to a full day as an option. The federal government decided to support half-day nursery-type programs with funds for Head Start programs and to reap the advantages of early education. Unfortunately, too few half-day programs are available to provide a workable alternative to most working parents.

With some arranging you can take advantage of these programs, as they are often the only ones around with space available. You might have to find someone for the remaining hours and depend on this person to pick up your child or to babysit for a few hours each day. Having your child in several places during the day is more worrisome than having him or her in one safe, secure place. But this situation might work if the pieces of your child's day are arranged carefully.

POOLING YOUR RESOURCES is another alternative. You may want to explore putting your resources together with other parents on a regular basis and working out an economical and effective arrangement. In a group, you can afford to hire the kind of sitter you couldn't afford to hire individually. If an age split keeps your children from being accepted at the same place of child care, you can create your own family day care home situation with others by employing a sitter to come into one of your homes.

BABYSITTING CO-OPS are also a good arrangement. They are organized through large food co-ops, colleges or universities, companies and other groups. They often emphasize occasional exchanges and will give you a list of students or other persons to choose from. Frequently it is hard to get a sitting exchange going on a regular basis unless one person manages it or unless the responsibility rotates according to an agreed-upon schedule.

A COMMUNAL LIVING ARRANGEMENT is yet another alternative if you and others agree to live together to share child care. Living together turns out to be as good or as bad as each one makes it. It can be a complicated problem or a simple solution. If you are well matched and are willing to cooperate and share the responsibilities, it will work out all around. The important thing is, you need to be able to talk freely with the person with whom you want to share your child's care. An arrangement in which everyone shares a part can be worked out so that no one person need handle all of the responsibilities. You can exchange skills with others, or jobs to be done.

Those who turn to their family and close friends for help in child care occasionally find people who have the time and commitment to raise the children as their own. More often, however, relatives and friends can offer only limited and sporadic help, making it necessary for parents to seek child care outside their circle of close associates.

These alternatives are presented to give you a chance to explore as many choices as possible. Any child care arrangement works well when both child and parent feel good about the people and places involved. If each day the communication among everyone involved is clear and enjoyable, the balance between your child care arrangement and home will be easier.

KNOWING THE PROGRAM

A good program for children includes a range of activities that appeal to children, allowing enough time for active pursuits and restful interludes with large and small groups and sometimes on their own. The kind of curriculum will depend on the program and the staff of the center or home. Basic elements include talking and sharing, indoor and outdoor play, arts and crafts, reading stories, and special projects. Learning also involves experiences with numbers, puzzles, games, music, cooking, creative opportunities, and everyday living routines that children need to learn to gain skills. Also included are snacks and meals, naps, and clean-up time.

A TYPICAL DAY IN A CHILD CARE CENTER OR HOME

MORNING		AFTERNOON	
7:00- 9:15	Free Play Inside and Out	12:30-2:30	Nap Time
		2:30-3:00	Wake-Up Time
9:15- 9:30	Clean-Up Bathroom		Snack Bathroom
9:30-10:00	Group Time Sharing & Music	3:00-3:45	Arts and Crafts Free Play
10:00-11:00	Various Specific Educational Activities	3:45-4:00	Clean-Up
		4:00-5:00	Outdoor Play
11:00-11:30	Outdoor Play	5:00-6:00	Quiet Activities
11:30-12:00	Story Time Bathroom		
12:00-12:30	Lunch		

On arriving, children are greeted by the staff and made to feel welcome. They put their coats or sweaters in the storage unit; then, if it is early, they may enjoy breakfast with the other children.

The first session includes any number of activities geared to the age level and interests of the children. This is a time when some children will be working on specific skills and learning through doing. Typical activities of this nature are story-telling, cutting out pictures, assembling puzzles, listening to records, dramatic play, growing things, using art materials, making things, playing with blocks, learning shapes, experimenting with colors, and discovering movement through exercise or dance.

Later, the children have time to go outdoors and play; sand, water, blocks, tricycles, and other toys make this time challenging and fun.

When the children return indoors for clean-up and rest before lunch, there may be music or some songs or stories to listen to. Lunchtime is always a major event and is an enjoyable time for everyone. Sometimes the children may bake or make foods to add to the menu; making salad, Jello, or cookies, or even preparing fruits and vegetables are things children enjoy.

Naps after lunch provide an important rest for the children. This is vital to their well-being, and most of them do sleep during this time.

After nap time, activities similar to those of the morning are often engaged in, such as crafts, dramatic play, cooking a snack, or other simple and fun projects. Sometimes an hour of quality children's television is enjoyed, but more often the time is spent playing, inside or out; constructing something from wood or other materials; or playing and learning other things. If the center or home relies on television too much during the day to keep the children occupied, you might question the overall quality of the program. Again, the quality of a program always depends on what activities are chosen and to what extent they are included.

The entire program of the center or home will be satisfying and stimulating only as a result of the combined efforts of the staff and parents. The kinds of specific activities are end'ess, with no limits except those imposed by the limits of the imagination and skill of the people who will be caring for your child each day.

The close of the day is as important as the beginning. Each child should feel that the day was spent in a satisfying way. In choosing a program, be sure that the philosophy, skills, and activities presented to the children are in accord with your ideas and feelings about the needs of your child.

The qualities of the successful child care staff are:

1. They are able to talk easily with children. They know about the needs of each child and respond positively, sensitively, patiently, and with a sense of humor.

2. They listen to the children and respond easily to their questions.

3. They encourage each child to use imagination and creative skills.

4. They know what they are doing and respect the differences in each child.

5. They provide a warm, loving atmosphere where each child is important.

6. They rely on a variety of interesting, educational materials, crafts, toys, and activities that children enjoy, including singing, dancing, and frequent outdoor play.

7. They manage discipline without hurting the child.

8. They listen and respond happily to people.

9. They allow the children to work out their differences and to solve problems without interfering too often.

10. They seem flexible in the routines of the day and have a clear plan for a balanced program.

11. They are aware of themselves and how their moods, voice tone, and behavior affect children's behavior.

12. They respect each child and family and communicate easily with parents.

interested in each child's development
aware of and tuned into children
understand the teaching and learning process
warm, friendly, sensitive people
skilled in leading activities
creative and imaginative
trained to know what to do
STAFF

SPECIAL NEEDS

NOTE ON INFANT CARE

The care of infants outside their homes has been a source of controversy for some time. If you have a sitter in your home, you may have no more guarantee of the quality of the care than you do if your child is in the sitter's home, in a family day care home, or in a center specially designed for the care of infants. However, the quality of supervision, training, and other benefits obviously will be greater in those places designed and licensed to care specially for infants. You can judge the quality of the service according to your discussions with the staff and the other parents, and based on the observations you make of the program.

Things to look for: a small number of infants with each adult; caregivers who interact warmly and with a lot of affection; a place well designed for the infants to play, move, and crawl about in safety; and active cooperation between parents and staff so both know and understand each other and the individual needs of the infant. The characteristics you will want to look for in a caregiver are patience, warmth, and a nurturing attitude toward the infant. The caregiver should be a person who likes infants and recognizes their need to be talked to, cuddled, and allowed to crawl about; one who is aware of nutrition, cleanliness, and emergency care; who is in good health and has the energy and interest to provide the love and care so vital to a young baby. The program should offer sufficient individual attention, feeding, diapering, and time for sleeping, as well as a lot of affection and stimulation. The staff should encourage language and physical development on a continuous and consistent basis. Children's needs begin at birth and develop throughout their early years. The more the caregiver knows and understands these needs, the greater is the likelihood that the program will fulfill your wishes for your infant.

NOTE ON THE HANDICAPPED CHILD

More schools, centers, and homes are offering opportunities for children with handicaps of varying degrees to be enrolled in programs with nonhandicapped children. If your child has a handicap, you need to look at and take into consideration the parti-

cular special needs of your child as you explore the child care alternatives suggested.

The program should provide, in addition to very well qualified and sensitive teachers, the on-call resources of a nurse, speech therapist, physical therapist, and other specialists. The physical space should be easy for the child to move around in. The program should be well defined and each child should be able to find interesting and enjoyable activities to engage in. The relationship between you and the caregiver will be very important, as you both will be committed to providing valuable learning and social experiences for your child.

NOTE ON AFTERSCHOOL CARE FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

After children reach kindergarten or first grade, and through most of their elementary years, their ability to be independnet increases. However, they still require supervision and attention. Many children, due to the lack of sufficient afterschool arrangements, are "latch-key" children who return to homes where there is no one to watch them. They are often lonely. Many improvements are now taking place. More schools are open after three o'clock to provide afterschool recreation, arts, and crafts. Parents can arrange for nearby family day care home providers or sitters to be responsible for their children after school. Children at this age want to have a place to go, friends to play with, and interesting activities to occupy them. They also want and need an adult to turn to.

At this age, children like dramatics, music, dance, crafts or art projects, games, sports, and other kinds of recreation. They like to have options available, to choose from a number of possible activities. Being supervised as part of a group after school is very beneficial to children; it fills two needs – the need for security and the need for amusement while they are away from their parents. You may also want to find out about any full-day programs your community's public schools provide – offering balanced days of learning, supervision, and creative activities for your child.

Part Three

GETTING READY TO LOOK

Looking at your needs and the needs of your child is the first step in choosing child care. The next steps are searching and selecting among the various arrangements possible. Now you are ready to begin to seek out the best care for your child for the time you will be apart each day. You may be considering either a full-time or a part-time arrangement.

Regardless of the arrangement you choose or the length of time you will need it, the checklists will give you ideas on deciding which kind of place you will select. Just as your child will be moving out into the larger world outside your home, so will you. Here you have a responsibility to find the best solution to your needs as a person. You will be out earning money for your family or doing other activities, and at the same time wanting to meet the social, emotional, and learning needs of your child. The arrangements you make will affect you, your job, and your child.

What you want to find out is what works as the best child care situation. The feelings you have about the place and the people in it are very important. The feelings your child will have each day are even more important for both of you. Fortunately, adults can change jobs, classes, or situations more easily than children. Select carefully so that your child's overall needs will be met in a positive way and be rewarding for everyone.

SEARCHING YOUR COMMUNITY

Before you go any further in arranging child care you'll want to explore the options available in your community. Set aside a few hours one morning to make some preliminary phone calls. It's very easy to call and ask questions. You can get a lot of information over the phone and not have to make a commitment.

Get ready for your morning phone calls by gathering phone numbers. In some lucky communities one phone call will get you a child care information-and-referral service that can give you much assistance. The Childcare Switchboard in San Francisco has a staff of people answering parents' telephone inquiries about where to find child care five days a week. The Switchboard also assists parents in setting up alternatives such as playgroups and small schools when other forms of child care don't suit their needs. (The Childcare Switchboard is listed at the back of this booklet in the Resources section.)

In most places, you can call the Department of Social Services for a listing of licensed family day care homes in your area. You might not be able to get a list the same day you call, so call them a couple of days before you plan to make your morning phone calls. You can find out which state or county agency also provides a listing or information about licensed family day care homes by consulting your telephone directory. This agency might be titled "Department of Social Services" or "Office of Children's Services." In some places you can get a directory of the licensed centers or homes in your area by calling the state or county department responsible for licensing programs.

Other sources from which to gather phone numbers of possible child care services are newspapers, school placement offices, bulletin boards in the offices of pediatricians, bulletin boards in community places, the Yellow Pages, the Department of Social Services, and friends. Sitters who are available and family day care homes that have vacancies do advertise in newspapers, so get copies of both the large dailies and the smaller local weeklies. These people also advertise in local laundromats and on supermarket bulletin boards, so be sure to look there. Many excellent sitters or informal day care homes have no trouble finding people and don't bother to advertise. With luck, you might be fortunate enough to find someone very good and close to home. Ask everyone you know if they know of some good child care arrangements. Through a conversation in the park one day, one mother found an excellent sitter who lived right across

the street; the conversation between two parents led them onto the topic of sitters, and a solution was found. Child care centers are also listed in the Yellow Pages under "Nursery Schools." Your pediatrician might know of some good child care arrangements in your area, too. It's worth a call to ask. Very soon you will have a list of real possibilities.

Don't settle for the first place you find, nor the one that's nearest at hand. Nor should you take somebody's word that this one or that one is best without checking it out yourself. You wouldn't want to buy a refrigerator or car that way, so don't do that in choosing child care.

The information you gather about sitters, centers, homes, and informal alternatives may quickly become overwhelming and confusing. Make a list of phone numbers for each type of situation – sitters, homes, centers, and any other alternatives you like – and organize them in a notebook by location.

Now you are ready to make a morning or two of phone calls and to take the next step.

TALKING WITH CAREGIVERS

Call the person or place first for information. Some items are better to talk about later, when you are actually visiting, than over the phone. When visiting, the questions you ask about what you see will allow you to become even clearer. The checklists of things to discuss in a center or home situation, or with a sitter, follow this section.

Record your information on a pad or in a notebook. Your first conversation might go like this:

"HELLO, MY NAME IS_____ AND I HAVE A JOB WITH_____ . I HAVE A YOUNG CHILD WHO IS_____YEARS OLD. I'M LOOKING FOR CHILD CARE AND WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE SPACE IN YOUR PROGRAM. DO YOU HAVE TIME NOW TO TALK ABOUT THE PROGRAM? . . . WELL, DO YOU HAVE AN APPLICATION FORM, AND CAN YOU SEND IT, PLEASE? THANK YOU VERY MUCH."

If there are no openings, you may still want to continue with your questions if the person has time. Keep this information for a possible opening later.

The person may ask that you call back when it is more convenient to talk with you.

These are some of the questions you might ask *before* you decide to visit:

1. Do you have a current license? Who licenses you? (If there is no license, find out why.)
2. How many children are you taking care of?
3. How many adults work in your program?
4. What hours are you open? When can the children come and when is pick-up time?
5. How much do you charge? Do you have a sliding scale for fees?
6. Would you describe the building? program? activities? What is a typical schedule of the children's day?
7. Do you provide any special services such as transportation? health care? trips?
8. What are the meals like and who prepares them?
9. Who will be with my child?
10. Is it possible to visit the center (or home)? Arrange to visit when you can meet the person who will have the most contact with your child.)
11. When is the best time for this visit? (If possible, arrange for time in the morning or when children are involved in their usual activities.)
12. How long can I stay and observe on my own?

Arrange a date and time if your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. If not, thank the person for his or her time and continue through your list.

Sometimes the waiting list, especially for a good program, is very long. This is very discouraging. If the program is what you want, however, it may be advisable to place your name on the list for the future. Sometimes a space will open up just when you are ready for a change anyway. A busy director or family day care home provider might discourage you from visiting until there is actually room in the program for your child, but if the program sounds excellent, and it is convenient and possible for you to visit at this point, do so. Then you'll be more certain about using the service later on. Until the place you really want has an opening, you may have to arrange a temporary situation for your child.

Part Four

SPECIFICS ON VISITS

ABOUT USING THE CHECKLISTS

The checklists are a clear-cut and concise guide to what to look for when you go to visit. Each place you look at will appear different and special. Not every program in a center or home will be the same, although there may be certain similarities.

The questions included here will give you the specific items to ask about and look at when you go for your first visit.

You should visit as many places as you can and use the checklists each time. In this way you can record your impressions and review them later. Ask yourself in each place: "How will my child enjoy being here in this space with these adults and children each day?"

Look at the whole place, inside and out. Observe how the staff supervise the children and how they talk with each other. How easy is it for the adults and children to move around? Is the place inviting and a nice place to be? Can children be comfortable and safe at the same time? Words like "homey" and "comfortable" or "cold" and "cluttered" may come up. Is the place well arranged and attractive? Or is it crowded and impersonal? You will get a sense of these things as you move around and look at the place.

You may feel uncomfortable about taking the checklists into the place you are visiting. If so, use them in another way: become thoroughly familiar with what we suggest you look at, how to go about looking, and which questions to ask yourself. Then you can leave the checklists in your purse or pocket and fill them out right after you complete each visit.

We think those who offer child care should welcome parents' concern and interest. An informed parent is an asset to any child care situation. But some people might feel uncomfortable by your judging them this way in their presence. Do what is best in each situation. You should take as much time as possible for this process. Two hours is a good amount of time to learn about the center. Talk with the director and the teacher, and watch the children move through several activities in order to learn more about the program. If you are not certain after reviewing the checklist and examining your own feelings, return for another visit and ask to talk with some of the other parents. If you can, attend a parent-teacher meeting. Sharing within the center among the staff and parents is one of the important ways a child care situation becomes successful for everyone. You can arrange with other parents to assist each other in many ways in the center or home. We hope your experience in child care is that everyone is open and ready to respond and respect what you as a person and a parent have to offer.

WAYS TO KNOW THE PROGRAM

This section will take you through each of your visits by giving you a step-by-step process for looking at each program. Choosing child care is not easy for any parent. We want to share what we have learned to assist you in locating the most satisfactory place for your child. Ask the questions we have listed, add your own, and discuss the situation with friends and neighbors who may be able to share with you ideas and experiences they have had.

ABOUT THE PHYSICAL FACILITY CHECKLIST

The place a child spends time is very important. Environment is critical to growth and development. You will want to check out safety, creative use of the space, play areas, indoor and outdoor arrangements, and equipment. Often an older place lacking the latest equipment has many features that make it more than adequate. Provision for outdoor play and equipment and enough room to run around in are big considerations. Physical arrangements are one important aspect to pay attention to. There should be at least 30 square feet of space for each child enrolled. The place should be comfortable for children.

ABOUT THE EMOTIONAL CLIMATE CHECKLIST

What happens to the children emotionally in the environment is also critical. A place that needs paint may also be a place of love and attention. What is most essential is the way the children are treated by the adults and how they are encouraged to relate to each other. Beyond the basic care they need, children are most affected by the quality of the staff and the way these people interact and become involved with them and the other children. How discipline is handled and how comfortable children are with each other are important concerns.

ABOUT THE LEARNING CLIMATE CHECKLIST

An important part of the child care program is the number of opportunities for learning that children are given each day. Learning is a natural extension of the attitudes and training of the staff, of the way they relate to and teach children, of the kinds of equipment and toys provided. Trips and extra activites add to the overall program. Each day's natural learning experiences allow children to develop and grow mentally. Easy transitions from one activity to the next make for a balance in learning. Child care can prepare your child for the lifelong enjoyment and pursuit of learning and education, both in formal schooling and outside of school.

The quality and opportunities for parent involvement are other aspects of the overall program. Parents should be able to see their child's learning progress each day in the center or home and have this progress shared with them by the staff. Child care also gives parents new opportunities to learn from their child's experiences, from the teachers, and from each other.

ABOUT THE SOCIAL CLIMATE CHECKLIST

Another part of any program is the social or personal aspect, that of providing opportunities for children to get to know each other, to each contribute something special to the others. When the staff relate in a warm and supportive way, the children respond. They learn and play happily with each other. Children who are shy or who haven't had many experiences with other children grow when they too get the same attention and support often demanded by the more assertive children. Child care providers who really care about each child as an individual contribute to the children's social growth by planning

and allowing a variety of social experiences for all the children enrolled in the program. Encouraging active play for both boys and girls, and lots of opportunities to move, jump, and be creative, is essential in any program for young children.

ON OBSERVING

Don't take for granted what is most obvious about the place you visit. Toys, books, and fancy materials can be deceptive. The most important aspect is not immediately visible when you are looking at the children. Get over just looking at their cute appearance or smiles and actually see what they are expressing, feeling, and doing. Experience for yourself how it is to be them and how your child would relate to these adults and children. In some situations children may have to conform to the climate set by the staff and may be restrained from expressing themselves fully or comfortably. Writing down your judgments on each of the four aspects of the environment will give you the information you need to know how much happiness, love, and support your child will experience each day at the place you visit.

The checklists are provided for you to observe and record your observations on directly when you visit the program you are considering, or afterwards. Arrange for your visit over the phone beforehand with the director or caregiver. You will meet this person when you arrive at the center or home. As you walk around the place, your discussion should cover the points mentioned on each list.

Record the information that you need on each home and center you visit. Then place a circle around or check mark beside the best response for each question.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE HOME

Your discussion at a family day care home should cover these points.

1. NAME OF PROVIDER _____

   PHONE _____

   ADDRESS OF THE HOME _____

   EXPERIENCE OF PROVIDER _____

2. LENGTH OF TIME THE HOME HAS BEEN AVAILABLE FOR CHILD CARE

   _____

3. IS THE HOME LICENSED? YES NO

   DID YOU SEE THE LICENSE? YES NO

4. CAN THE PROVIDER CARE FOR A CHILD WHO BECOMES ILL?

   YES NO

   IS THERE A FIRST AID KIT? YES NO

   IS EMERGENCY CARE AVAILABLE? YES NO

5. DOES THE HOME KEEP INFORMATION ON RECORDS ON EACH CHILD?

   YES NO

6. WHAT IS THE PARENT'S ROLE IN THE HOME? _____

   WILL YOU BE EXPECTED TO BE PART OF THE PROGRAM? _____

7. CAN YOU HAVE THE NAMES OF OTHER PARENTS WHO USE THE HOME?

   YES NO

8. YOUR OWN QUESTIONS _____

   _____

   _____

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTER

Your discussion at the center should cover the following points.

1. NAME OF DIRECTOR _____ PHONE _____

   NAME AND ADDRESS OF CENTER _____

   _____

2. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL PROVIDE THE CARE _____

   TYPE OF EXPERIENCE THE PERSON HAS HAD _____

3. IS THE PLACE LICENSED? YES NO

   DID YOU SEE THE LICENSE? YES NO

4. ARE THE ADULTS ABLE TO HANDLE EMERGENCIES THAT MIGHT COME UP? YES NO

   IS THERE A FIRST AID KIT? YES NO

   WHAT ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE WHEN A CHILD BECOMES ILL?

   _____

   WHAT ARE THE USUAL HEALTH CARE PRACTICES?

   _____

5. WHAT RECORDS ARE KEPT ON THE CHILDREN AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT? _____

6. WHAT IS THE PARENT'S ROLE AT THE CENTER? _____

   _____

   WILL YOU BE EXPECTED TO BE PART OF THE PROGRAM?

   YES NO

7. WILL THE DIRECTOR PROVIDE YOU WITH THE NAMES OF OTHER PARENTS WHO USE THE CENTER? YES NO

8. YOUR OWN QUESTIONS _____

   _____

THE PHYSICAL FACILITY CHECKLIST

Look over the space for the safety features, well-planned and adequate space, the condition of play equipment inside and out, and overall attractiveness.

1. DOES THE SPACE SEEM SAFE? (ARE LIGHTS AND SOCKETS COVERED OR OUT OF REACH?)	YES	NO
2. IS THERE ENOUGH SPACE, AND IS IT WELL PLANNED SO THERE IS NO CROWDING?	YES	NO
3. IS THE EQUIPMENT INSIDE AND OUT VARIED, STURDY, AND EASY FOR A CHILD TO USE?	YES	NO
4. IS THE PLACE ATTRACTIVE AND COMFORTABLE? (ARE THERE PLANTS, PETS, AND SPECIAL AREAS FOR ACTIVITIES?)	YES	NO
5. CAN THE CHILDREN GET INSIDE AND OUTSIDE SAFELY AND WITHOUT DIFFICULTY?	YES	NO
6. ARE THE MATERIALS AMPLE, IN GOOD CONDITION, AND EASILY AVAILABLE? (CAN CHILDREN REACH THE VARIETY OF BOOKS, TOYS, ART SUPPLIES?)	YES	NO
7. ARE THE BATHROOM FACILITIES CLEAN AND EASY FOR A CHILD TO USE? (EASY-TO-REACH FAUCETS, TOILETS, TOOTHBRUSHES AND TOOTHPASTE, PAPER TOWELS, ETC.?)	YES	NO
8. ARE MEALS NUTRITIOUS AND WELL BALANCED, AND IS THE FOOD PREPARED AND SERVED ATTRACTIVELY?	YES	NO
9. DO THE CHILDREN HAVE A COMFORTABLE AND QUIET PLACE FOR NAPS?	YES	NO
10. DOES THE PLACE HAVE PROVISIONS FOR AN ILL CHILD?	YES	NO

TALLY OF OBSERVATIONS ON PHYSICAL FACILITY

Total Number of "Yes" Answers _____

Total Number of "No" Answers _____

WORDS I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE THE PLACE

HOW WOULD MY CHILD FEEL ABOUT THIS PLACE?

HOW DO I FEEL ABOUT THISPLACE?

THE EMOTIONAL CLIMATE CHECKLIST

This second part of your observations is about becoming aware of how the children relate to each other, how the staff relates to the children and to each other, and how comfortable you are about visiting the place. How will your child fit in?

1.	DO THE CHILDREN SHOW THEY REALLY LIKE AND TRUST THE ADULTS A LOT? (DO THEY RECEIVE RESPECT, ATTENTION, AND SUPPORT?)	YES	NO
2.	DO THE CHILDREN APPEAR HAPPY, COMFORTABLE, AND RELAXED?	YES	NO
3.	DOES THE STAFF COMMUNICATE EASILY WITH EACH CHILD?	YES	NO
4.	DOES THE DISCIPLINE REFLECT MY PHILOSOPHY?	YES	NO
5.	ARE THE CHILDREN ALLOWED TO PURSUE THEIR OWN INTERESTS ACCORDING TO THEIR ABILITIES?	YES	NO
6.	ARE THE CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL NEEDS GIVEN FIRST PRIORITY?	YES	NO
7.	WOULD MY CHILD RECEIVE THE ATTENTION HE OR SHE NEEDS AND BE TREATED FAIRLY HERE?	YES	NO
8.	ARE PROBLEMS HANDLED WITH LITTLE UPSET?	YES	NO
9.	DOES THE DIRECTOR OR TEACHER ANSWER MY QUESTIONS OPENLY?	YES	NO
10.	DO I FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THE STAFF AND THE PLACE?	YES	NO

TALLY OF OBSERVATIONS ON EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

Total Number of "Yes" Answers _____

Total Number of "No" Answers _____

WORDS I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE THE EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

HOW WOULD MY CHILD FEEL ABOUT THIS PLACE?

HOW DO I FEEL ABOUT THIS PLACE?

THE LEARNING CLIMATE CHECKLIST

The third step involves looking at the ways the staff relate to the children and encourage their learning and their discovery of new skills and information. Are many materials available and suitable for the age and number of the children? How much learning takes place in the program and would your child gain?

1. IS THE PLACE ARRANGED EASILY FOR LEARNING AND GROWING?	YES	NO
2. DOES THE PROGRAM SEEM WELL PLANNED?	YES	NO
3. DOES THE PROGRAM PROVIDE MANY DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD?	YES	NO
4. CAN CHILDREN MOVE AROUND AND FIND MATERIALS EASILY?	YES	NO
5. ARE THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES SUITABLE FOR THE DIFFERENT AGES?	YES	NO
6. ARE THE CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS ANSWERED EASILY?	YES	NO
7. DO THE CHILDREN RECEIVE ENOUGH OF THE KIND OF INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION AND ASSISTANCE THEY NEED?	YES	NO
8. DO THE CHILDREN ENJOY THE ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE?	YES	NO
9. ARE SPECIAL EVENTS AND TRIPS USUAL ACTIVITIES?	YES	NO
10. ARE THE CHILDREN'S WORKS SUCH AS DRAWINGS AND CHILD-CRAFTED THINGS BOTH DISPLAYED AND DISCUSSED WITH PARENTS AND AVAILABLE FOR THE PARENTS TO TAKE HOME?	YES	NO

TALLY OF OBSERVATIONS ON LEARNING CLIMATE

Total Number of "Yes" Answers _____

Total Number of "No" Answers _____

WHAT IS TAUGHT AND HOW IS IT TAUGHT?

WORDS I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

HOW DO I FEEL ABOUT THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES HERE?

THE SOCIAL CLIMATE CHECKLIST

Look at the ways the children in the place are encouraged to play and know each other. Do they relate to each other well or are there unresolved conflicts and many disruptions? Are children who are having conflicts being frustrated or are they receiving assistance?

Do the children seem to enjoy each other and the adults in the program, and how well would your child fit in?

1. DO I LIKE HOW THE CHILDREN BEHAVE AND RELATE TO EACH OTHER?	YES	NO
2. ARE CONFLICTS HANDLED SENSITIVELY?	YES	NO
3. WOULD MY CHILD FIT IN WITH THE PRESENT GROUP?	YES	NO
4. WOULD MY CHILD HAVE A GOOD TIME HERE?	YES	NO
5. ARE THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF EACH CHILD RESPECTED?	YES	NO
6. DO THE CHILDREN RESPOND EASILY AND HAPPILY TO EACH OTHER?	YES	NO
7. DO THE CHILDREN PLAY WITHOUT A LOT OF CONFLICTS?	YES	NO
8. DO THE STAFF ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND PARTICIPATE?	YES	NO
9. ARE THE CHILDREN LEARNING BALANCED SOCIAL ROLES?	YES	NO
10. ARE PARENTS MADE TO FEEL WELCOME AND ENCOURAGED TO KNOW EACH OTHER?	YES	NO

TALLY OF OBSERVATIONS ON SOCIAL CLIMATE

Total Number of "Yes" Answers _____

Total Number of "No" Answers _____

WORDS I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE THE SOCIAL CLIMATE (ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES)

HOW COMFORTABLE WOULD MY CHILD FEEL?

HOW WOULD I FEEL ABOUT BEING A PARENT IN THIS PLACE?

TEN IMPORTANT CHECKS

1. CAN THE PLACE BE REACHED EASILY?	YES	NO
2. IS THE PLACE SAFE, COMFORTABLE, AND ATTRACTIVE?	YES	NO
3. DOES THE PLACE HAVE PLENTY OF GOOD AND VARIED TOYS AND EQUIPMENT FOR FUN AND LEARNING?	YES	NO
4. DO THE CHILDREN AND STAFF INTERACT HAPPILY AND COMMUNICATE EASILY?	YES	NO
5. DOES THE PLACE OFFER NUTRITIOUS, TASTY MEALS AND SNACKS?	YES	NO
6. IS EACH CHILD RESPECTED AS AN INDIVIDUAL?	YES	NO
7. DOES EACH CHILD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY AND SPACE FOR A WIDE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES, EITHER FOR PLAYING WITH OTHER CHILDREN OR FOR PLAYING QUIETLY BY HIMSELF OR HERSELF?	YES	NO
8. ARE MY NEEDS FOR THE CAREGIVER TO BE DEPENDABLE AND TO VALUE ME AS A PARENT CONSIDERED?	YES	NO
9. CAN I AFFORD THE FEES AT THIS PLACE?	YES	NO
10. IS THE PLACE SUITABLE FOR MY CHILD AND MY SITUATION?	YES	NO

TALLY OF TEN IMPORTANT CHECKS

TOTAL NUMBER OF "YES" ANSWERS _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF "NO" ANSWERS _____

Final Tally

	NUMBER OF "YES" ANSWERS
PHYSICAL FACILITY CHECKLIST	_____
EMOTIONAL CLIMATE CHECKLIST	_____
LEARNING CLIMATE CHECKLIST	_____
SOCIAL CLIMATE CHECKLIST	_____
TEN IMPORTANT CHECKS	_____
TOTAL "YES" ANSWERS (OUT OF 50)	_____

Rating

40 - 50 EXCELLENT PROGRAM. SERIOUSLY CONSIDER IT.

30 - 40 GOOD PROGRAM. THINK SOME MORE.

20 - 30 FAIR PROGRAM. DON'T CONSIDER IT IF YOU CAN AVOID IT.

LESS THAN 20 CONTINUE YOUR SEARCH.

FINAL COMMENTS ON THE CHECKLISTS

In each area – physical, emotional, learning, and social – do you have more YES answers than NO answers? If so, you have found a place that will probably care for your child well. If not, don't be discouraged. Continue your search until you find the most appropriate place for your child and one that will meet your standards for quality. The more YES responses, the more certain you can be that you are looking at a good possibility for your child.

TALKING WITH SITTERS

FIRST CONVERSATION WITH A POSSIBLE CAREGIVER AT YOUR HOME

1. Begin by making the prospective sitter feel comfortable and at ease in your home.

2. Explain your situation briefly.

3. Ask about the sitter's background in a general way. Find out what preparation the sitter has had.

   What is the sitter's experience? Have the sitter write down the names and phone numbers of at least two references.

   Name of previous employer _____

   Address/phone of employer _____

   Length of time worked _____

   Duties _____

4. By now you have a general idea of who the person is and what the person can do. Dig deeper. Ask specific questions like:

   Why did you change jobs?

   How do you think children should be disciplined?

   What do you expect in regard to the child's eating and toileting?

   Do you have any health problems that might interfere?

   Do you drive? drink?

   Have you had X-rays and a health checkup recently?

   Will you show up regularly to do the job? Yes No

   Do you feel confident you can handle my child if an emergency arises? Yes No

Will you be calm and interested in relating to my child, and not overly critical? Yes No

5. Next, spell out exactly what you want and make some agreements about:

   Work schedule

   Salary and when it will be paid

   All other arrangements desired (having medical release form on hand in case of an emergency so your child can receive hospital care if you are unavailable, for example)

6. Specify your limitations and your feelings about such things as:

   Drinking

   Smoking

   Use of telephone

   Food

   Use of television

7. You'll want to show your prospective sitter around the house, talk about where things are and what the person will have to do, and introduce the person to your child. This meeting is important to see how both relate to each other.

A NOTE ABOUT WHEN YOU FINALLY DECIDE ON SOMEBODY

Have things written down for the sitter, convenient to the telephone, and with a pad and pencil nearby.

Include numbers for:

Where you can be reached

A close relative or friend

Emergencies: doctor, fire, police, ambulance

Also, leave the sitter a list of important things to remember concerning your house, the children's routine, and other special arrangements.

Is there someone you can arrange to talk to and socialize with the sitter during the day so you can also get feedback about what's going on while you're away and about things that come up? The person should be someone whom you both know and who can be helpful to both you and the sitter, if possible.

We also suggest you send away for *The Pocket Guide to Babysitting,* an excellent handbook specifically written for and about sitters (See the References section of this guide for details).

Part Five

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

COMPARING AND CHOOSING

You have by now probably visited a number of centers and homes and have had considerable experience with a variety of sitters. Before you make your final selection, let's review what you have seen, and how you feel about the places and people you have seen, and reflect on what you are going to do next.

Take some time, sit down, and really think through all of the things you saw and heard. Separate the real possibilities from all the options. If you are still confused or uncertain about what you really want and need for your child and yourself, it's understandable. Options for child care are very often not perfect situations even when they look perfect on the surface.

By this time, you will probably be pretty certain about what type of care will suit your child best – home, larger group, sitter, or alternative. Make the best evaluation you can about which type of arrangement to sign up for. Then choose the one that appeals to you most and that you can afford. The discussion on planning your budget, in this section, will assist you with this.

Go through the checklists and look at all the information you gathered in your observations and discussions. Now match up the combination of your child's goals and needs and your own (as you defined them in Part One) with what each situation offers. You might want to do this with someone else so you can talk about and examine all of your considerations.

Now go through the answers on your checklist and ask yourself the following questions:

WHICH PLACE FELT BEST TO YOU? Were the way the place looked and the services provided for the children what you considered outstanding? Was it the way the staff seemed to know each child and talk to each one? Was it that the children seemed to be happy, playful, and content? How well would your child fit in? What concerns do you have? What else do you want to know about the program? If you have any doubts or want more information, contact a few of the parents to talk over your concerns and get answers to your questions.

IS THE PLACE CONVENIENT AND IS IT ACCESSIBLE BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION? Is it near your workplace? Will you be able to work each day and know your child is safe, secure, and happy in this place? Will your child receive good emergency care if an accident occurs or an illness arises? Will the hours of the place coincide with your work schedule?

WILL PARENT MEETINGS AND OTHER COMMITMENTS FIT YOUR TIME SCHEDULE? Are these meetings arranged at convenient times with consideration for parents and children? If you cannot attend evening meetings, are there other ways you can be involved in the program?

Are the other parents you have spoken with happy with the place, the staff, and the way their own children are making progress? If not, find out why.

Will you be allowed to be with your child the first days, until you and your child feel comfortable with the arrangement and make the adjustments? Can you visit when you want to?

If the answer to all these questions is YES, and the fee fits your budget, this could be the best choice. If you have additional questions and are uncertain, continue looking.

You might want to develop a secondary plan for child care arrangements for the next couple of years. Maybe you can find a better arrangement for just six months or a year. What's your second choice if the situation you choose doesn't work out? When you are more familiar with child care opportunities in your local area, selecting child care next time will be easier.

PREPARING A WORKABLE BUDGET

Shopping for child care is no simple matter, because you are dealing not with simple fixed fees, but also with an array of different and sometimes complicated eligibility requirements.

As we have said, the most expensive programs are not necessarily the best, and indeed, some of the best programs are the cheapest, if not free. It all depends on where the funds for the program come from – whether from the federal, state, or local government; from the school system or the welfare department; from private foundations, religious groups, or private industry; or entirely from parents' contributions.

Many good programs accept only the children of welfare- or poverty-level families. In these cases, having a job may disqualify you from the program. Other programs have fee scales based on income that may result in your paying a higher percentage of your income for child care as your income increases, leaving you with less money after a raise than before.

You must establish your personal priorities clearly. Bear in mind the effects your taking employment will have on whatever public assistance you receive, including food stamps. Consider also the effect it will have on your eligibility for different child care programs.

We suggest that before you commit yourself to work and a child care arrangement you go through your personal plan thoroughly. Develop alternatives so that you won't get caught by unforeseen circumstances. Before a major change of lifestyle and routine such as this, it is a good idea to imagine yourself in each of the possibilities open to you. Usually there is more than one combination of things you can do to meet your responsibilities and pursue your goals involving child care at the same time. For example, you could put your child on a waiting list for a center, take courses, and go on welfare for a while; you could participate in a parent co-op and work part-time; or you could use the skills you have to work at a job that might not be entirely satisfying, but will allow you to afford child care and to support yourself and your family if necessary. You can probably develop several alternative plans.

Knowing which plan is best for you is difficult. Give serious consideration to how you will make ends meet while at the same time providing for yourself and your children emotionally. List your alternatives on a piece of paper, along with your goals and what you hope to accomplish, and think about it for a few days. It is important that you consider exactly what your expenses will be so that you will be prepared for them.

Let's start by thinking through the expenses involved and different job possibilities, and plan a workable budget. Use this budget as a guide to list your alternatives.

YOUR BUDGET PLAN

	PLAN A	*PLAN B*
EXPECTED MONTHLY INCOME		
Monthly Gross		
Take-Home (Net)		
EXPECTED MONTHLY EXPENSES		
Rent		
Food		
Utilities		
Medical		
Other Fixed Payments		
EXPENSES THAT VARY WITH YOUR LIFESTYLE		
Transportation		
Schooling		
Clothing		
Meals away from Home		
Entertainment		
Costs of Child Care		
Savings		
Other		
TOTAL MONTHLY INCOME		
TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES		
REMAINDER		

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST DAYS AND WEEKS

Your child will be entering into a larger and more complicated situation once he or she is enrolled in a child care arrangement. You will have checked out all the possible arrangements and finally selected one. Your child needs your support and understanding during these first days. It is important that both of you be together during this time to make the transition from home to child care successfully.

Before your child enters child care, he or she must be inoculated by the county health department. Ask the center director or family day care home provider if you may stay with your child the first day or as long as necessary. Ask to take your lunch and eat with your child that day. Be there, but let your child find his or her own way. When the children are engaged in an activity, you may be able to assist. If for some reason you will not be able to stay for the entire day, tell your child earlier that you will be leaving and will be back to take him or her home. If you think your child will be upset about this, arrange your schedule so you won't have to leave; if you must leave, return in a short time. You may also want to leave for a few hours just to allow your child a chance to be there without you. The important thing is to make this change easily and without abruptness. There will probably be a lot of friendly assistance from the staff.

Ask your child if he or she wants to bring a toy or other familiar item. Pack an extra pair of playpants and underwear in a bag marked with your child's name. Make sure the staff have your work number and an emergency number of a friend or relative to call if for any reason you cannot be reached. Complete information should be left with the staff before you leave. If you have made a sincere effort to investigate the child care situation, when you leave your child for the first time you will be able to do so with peace of mind. You should be able to work or do what you must do in full confidence. If you are relaxed and comfortable, your child will be too.

Prepare your child for the first day by talking about being at a new and nice place where he or she will meet and play with other children. Also say that when he or she feels ready, you will leave to go to work. Say that the person at the place will know where you are all the time and can call you if necessary.

Stay at the center or home until the teacher or provider talks directly to your child, and your child wishes to begin an activity. Sometimes this first conversation is to ask your child's

name and make a nametag, or to invite your child to begin a game or join a circle of children engaged in a song or story. The important thing is to be there with the teacher's permission and your child's awareness that enough time will be given for him or her to feel totally at ease before the two of you part company. Some children will move right into the group and begin to participate immediately and comfortably from the first hour. Others will benefit from their parents' sensitive watching and sharing until the strangeness and newness wears off a bit. For some it may be a day, for others a week, and for others it may be still longer. Don't push or rush your child. Being sensitive to your child's responses at the onset will save a lot of unnecessary aggravation later.

Your child is unique and like no other in that center or home. Make sure the staff know your child before you leave, and that they recognize some of the subtle needs he or she has expressed to you. These needs and your own should always be respected and given attention.

Do whatever you can to prepare your child for a smooth transition. A couple of conversations to share some of your thoughts and plans with your child the week prior to the change are important, even with the youngest child. As you are getting dressed, you can say, "Soon I will be going to work, and you'll be going to a new school where you can have a good time with some other children. We will have to get dressed and have breakfast earlier in the morning to get to the center. You'll have a chance to play with the other children, and I think you'll like it very much."

Although it is best for your child's emotional well-being to make the transition gradually in order to get used to the new place and adjust, this is often impossible. You may not be able to get time off from work. Or the provider you have chosen might prefer to be the one to introduce new children into the group.

We recommend that you ask the provider if you can stay with your child. See if your suggestion is welcomed. Get an idea beforehand how long you will feel comfortable staying and tell your child your plans for the day.

You can say as you are getting ready to go the first morning, "I'm going to take you to the center, and you can play with the other children while I talk to the teachers for a few minutes. Then I'll be leaving." Or you can say, "I'm going to take you there and stay with you a while. Then I'll have to go. I can't get to work late."

In each case you're telling your child a little about what to expect and what he or she should do. You've made a decision about your part in handling any emotional upsets that arise and are setting a positive tone. If you have fears, don't show them. Let your child know you recognize how he or she feels and guide your child towards coping with the situation alone. No matter what your child can understand intellectually, he or she will respond to the essence of what you are saying and pick up cues from that about how to behave. If you tell children what to expect, and if what they hear is positive and without fear, the transition can be simple.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN HOME AND CHILD CARE

In a child's life, a gap lies between the world at home and the world of child care. You can bridge this gap through communication. You and your child will have an easier and more enjoyable time if you follow some basic steps in making the transition. A place away from home is not home: it is a new place to learn and grow. Your child will want to be encouraged to enjoy this place, the new friends, and the fresh experiences. He or she also has a responsibility to participate and make the most of the experience. Above all, do not pressure your child; just reassure him or her that the new experiences will be an adventure and valuable to both of you.

Take the time during the first weeks to readjust your schedule to make more time to be at the center or home. Let the staff know you are willing to do so as an interested and concerned parent.

Find out the names of other parents and contact those who live nearby so that you can arrange pools, informal meetings, or sitting swaps. Find out what kinds of activities parents get involved in and when the meetings are. Either join what is going on already or simply contribute whatever interests and ideas you have.

Take the time to talk each day with the staff about any concerns or information they might need to know about your child. You need to tell them about a cold, an upset in the family, a new job, or anything else that would in any way affect your child, be of concern, or interfere with the day. You also want to let them know that you will want to find out about your child's progress, the activities during the day, and new friends your child made.

Some suggestions follow for things to talk about with the staff at the end of the day. Find out if there are activities or discussions you can undertake at home to continue the daytime activities.

Focus on what happened during the day. Sometimes staff people are eager to tell you only good things about your child. Make it clear to them you're interested in how your child feels, and that you accept his or her feelings:

> "Did my child enjoy the food? What did my child eat?"
>
> "What pleased my child most? What displeased my child?"
>
> "Did my child take a nap?"
>
> "Is there a new food we can talk about and also have at home?"
>
> "Did my child learn a new skill he or she wants to share with me at home?"
>
> "Was there a special activity which could be talked about or continued at home?"
>
> "Is there a new friend to invite over to play on the weekend?"
>
> "How are my child's relationships with other children or adults progressing?"

In this way you can keep in touch with your child's life away from you. If a problem arises, you'll have an idea where it's coming from and be able to respond more effectively.

Can you tell the staff what is happening with your child at home? Your child may have particular needs that day.

Some things to tell the staff at the beginning of the day:

> What's going on at home or if any problems have come up

If your child had a new experience that the staff would like to know about

What your child has said regarding the program

What changes you see in your child related to the program – such as new abilities, interests, and attitudes

KNOWING THAT YOUR CHILD IS HAPPY

You know your child best. You can judge with your own eyes and ears what is happening with your child as the time passes. If your child is happy each day and looks forward to going to the place of child care, you know you've made a good choice. Other clues are whether your child shares with you what has happened

during the day; brings things home that he or she drew, painted, or made; is able to eat and sleep as usual; and generally is not uncertain or upset.

The caregiver or staff person usually wants to provide what is best for your child and realizes that children vary greatly in what they can adapt to and handle. And everyone wants to give a child every opportunity for a good situation. You will be able to see for yourself what the results are by talking with your child each day specifically about the program and by making observations. Children tell the truth and generally share what is happening openly.

Don't panic at the first problem. There are bound to be several problems that arise in the first days. Accept the challenges that arise and deal with them. If you share some of the problems with the staff or other parents, solutions sometimes can be found. If for any reason the situation is not working out for you or your child after a few weeks, let the caregiver know about the problems you are having and be looking elsewhere for an alternative. Do not leave without notifying the staff; and if the problems cannot be resolved, at least discuss them so that the staff are aware of your reasons for leaving.

CONNECTING WITH OTHER PARENTS

> "Some of my best friends are people I met through my son's nursery school."
>
> "She and I worked in the cooperative together, and we just knew we'd be friends forever."
>
> "Come to a reunion. The kids would love to get together."

Child care is a great avenue for finding friends in a world often lonely, isolated, and distant from the people you are familiar with. Often when your child is ready for child care it is also time for you to find a new set of friends who share your interests and problems in this area. Seeing other parents and teachers interacting with children gives you perspective on what you're doing and maybe some ideas on how to do things differently. Get involved in your child care arrangement – it's a great opportunity for you, as well as good for the children and the center or home.

If you interact in a friendly way, pausing to speak with

teachers, parents, and the children also, or take part in some activities for the center, the whole center will seem more personal and friendlier to everyone around. Your friendliness will bring warmth to the staff, children, and parents, and will contribute to the continual improvement of the atmosphere there.

SOME ACTIVITIES YOU CAN BE INVOLVED IN AT THE CENTER OR HOME

* Spend a few hours reading stories, playing games, or cooking with the children.

* Create some new decorations for the place – curtains or pictures or plants.

* Contact other parents to create a fund-raising affair for new equipment and toys.

* Invite a guest such as a pediatrician, nurse, or community health worker to give a health talk.

* Give individual attention to a child who may be in special need due to a personal problem.

* Establish a sitting-swap announcements bulletin board as one way for parents to share with each other.

* Set up a revolving toy library that parents can contribute to and share in.

* Send letters of support for new child care funds to city, state, and national officials.

* Ask to set up a parent lounge or other place where parents can relax or sip coffee and spend a few moments before they leave or pick up their children.

PARENT DISCUSSION GROUPS

Meeting other parents for discussion in informal parent groups can be valuable to everyone. Just knowing that you're not alone in your problems when things are rough can ease a lot of stress. Parents can give each other a great deal of understanding and support.

At a party, you might feel a little ridiculous seeking out someone to talk to about "Batman and my child's problem with nightmares" while others are discussing world affairs. A parent group gives you a context to talk about what you're very much involved in. It's a place to exchange information about what concerns you, and where you can also help other people out. Solving your child's problems with nightmares might seem as important to you as world problems, and it is! An informal parent group can assist you in making those nightmares of your own disappear, can reassure you when things don't work, give you understanding and support, and help you grow. It is truly educational to face one of the most important challenges you'll have in life – raising your children.

Some people find their parent group so satisfying they wouldn't miss it. If it's raining, they bundle up their children and take them along. If they're attending a course, when it's over they want to take another course. A parent group becomes an element of their lifestyle while their children are young.

A group of eight or ten parents-to-be or new parents can gather informally, meeting once a week or twice a month regularly. Other parents can get together through their children's child care arrangements. Co-ops often set aside a few nights a month for these kinds of discussions. Centers are often very responsive to parents' desires along this line and might even provide the group with a leader who has specialized knowledge. There are usually parent groups in metropolitan areas, that offer special sessions or courses that examine all aspects of being a parent. In these groups you can deal with yourself and your problems, as well as your relationship to society, whatever your role or position.

However you do it, it's worthwhile to share yourself by participating in a parent group.

SHARING EXPERIENCES

Parenthood and work are a difficult combination. The stresses can overwhelm anyone at times. We are often like jugglers with too many balls in the air – finances, home maintenance, food, the changing panorama of our children's needs and growth – to name a few. Like jugglers, we need balance and efficiency, timing and experience. You will have to make the things you are doing a part of you until you become as confident as a juggler who almost never drops the balls.

The more successful you are with the lifestyle you choose, the more competent you are likely to be at making arrangements and scheduling, getting things done, being true to yourself, and enjoying your children. These are all things you get better at as you become more aware. Your ability to accomplish these things grows and changes. You improve as you gain experience.

The amount of time you spend with your child is important, but the quality of that time together is even more important. Studies of working mothers and non-working mothers have shown that the most important factor in children's emotional well-being and later functioning in society is the nature or quality of the interaction between mother, father, and child, rather than the quantity or amount of attention or time spent.

You know it's a matter of learning your capabilities and arranging the elements of your life so that things don't go astray. You took a step to balance these elements when you figured out your goals and priorities. The elements of a busy and balanced life run more smoothly when you have a firm foundation of clear goals and priorities.

So now that you know where you stand, you can begin a big change for you and your child. Scheduling your time and getting into a new routine are part of the responsibility. You need an equal amount of each of these things in your life:

maintaining your home,

pursuing personal goals,

teaching and enjoying your children,

learning from them,

reaching out to people,

and spending time alone.

Probably it seems there's not quite enough of you to go around, with all the responsibilities you're juggling. But remember, these have to be handled one at a time. You can't do it all at once: you can't be talking to your child, settling a fight, cleaning house, figuring out your finances, calculating your menu for next week, planning the shopping route, socializing with friends, and making a phone call at the same time, though you probably found yourself trying that at times. You become harried and "harried" quickly leads to "nasty" – you want to avoid this for yourself and others. You have to take time, whatever amount is needed, to take care of each problem as it comes along.

The work you do taking care of your multiple responsibilities requires as much efficiency and as many skills as any other difficult job. Work to gain those skills. Make a time budget for relaxing, personal enjoyment and growth, nurturing your children, and cultivating friendships, as well as for routine and work. Make space for these things. Long hours of work require relaxation time to offset them. You need to find ways to relax and share your feelings. In your situation, what can you do to accomplish this?

Help yourself by being realistic and seeing what you really want. Stick to what's most important to you. Things will work out.

The world might not be the way you like it, but don't waste your energy in self-defeating ways. Put your energy into something useful – like supporting the creation of expanded and improved child care services, for example. Find out to whom you can write to support child care legislation, and then write a few letters (and keep writing). Better yet, become active. Organize a parent participation group or work with your local child care advocacy organizations.

Find a form of relaxation that is not just an escape from the problems of life. Everybody you are involved with will be happier too. Be the active creator of the solutions to your problems. But make room for the ups and downs of life and the ups and downs of your feelings. Some days you will function better than others.

You can't do everything and can't be everything to all people at all times, so don't feel guilty. Catch yourself when you worry about your child when you're at work, or your work and your responsibilities when you're at home. You can overcome some of the fears you have by sharing your feelings with other

people. Groups where you can meet people who share your interests and concerns are good for that and more. If you find the stresses of your life and your feelings overwhelming you, get some help in working things out through counseling. When you are meeting the stresses and demands of working and parenting you need to be emotionally supported in whatever way you can be.

You will want to find ways to relax from the pressures of the day and to enjoy a variety of different activities alone, with friends, or with your child. However, when you pursue your own needs and interests in such a way that your child feels uncared for and unimportant or insecure about what is expected or what to expect, his or her emotional needs accelerate. Soon you'll find your child making you both miserable.

Neither you nor your child has to make eac[illegible]er miserable. If you work things out and are caring and deliberate, you can make your interaction with your child a gentle, friendly, giving one that will bring you both joy. Remember how it is to be a child. Children like to be treated pleasantly and with respect. They don't want to be afraid. Communicate directly about your feelings and allow your child to share his or hers with you. You will both gain.

Here are a few personal suggestions:

CREATE SPECIAL TIMES. Spend time with your child regularly – both scheduled and spontaneous time. Make your child feel important by allowing no interruptions. Get to know what is happening with your child. If your child feels and knows he or she is loved, you won't feel bad about not being around.

SIMPLIFY LIVING. Have potluck suppers and share cooking and sitting exchanges as a regular part of your life. You will have friends, your child will have friends, and everyone will be more relaxed and happier. Make clean-up something everyone contributes to, according to his or her ability. It's good to know that your children are able to take care of a lot of their own needs and can also assist you in the house with jobs that are geared to their age and ability.

EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS. Take a course; better yet, take two courses – one for yourself, one to share with your children. Work toward a goal – get that better job, work on something such as a community improvement project that

will benefit others, and so on. Express yourself. Find a little time to do what you always wanted to do.

SUPPORT YOURSELF EMOTIONALLY. Express how you feel and what you want. Don't be afraid to ask others, including children and friends, to work as hard as you do.

TAKE TIME OFF. Do things alone once in a while. Cultivate relationships with people who want to share the joys of relating to your children – good friends, former spouses, grandparents, foster grandparents.

A FINAL WORD

Child care services will be as good as we want them to be and are willing to work for, create, and improve them to be. Perhaps at some point the amount of money and resources expended for each child will be adequate to provide optimal physical environments and educational and social services. Until then, we must find ways together to create with the resources available the best care for children when we must work. We hope the suggestions in this guide will assist you in choosing from what is available now and that they point the way for some of the kinds of services that should ideally be offered at every center or home. Having ideas and a goal to work toward helps us focus our attention.

In the course of events, you will find new and different ways to share and be involved in your child's program. We'd like to hear from you so that in preparing later revisions of this guide we can respond to your ideas and experiences.

We wish you all the best in combining the tasks that lie ahead – it certainly is not easy to balance all the roles you are called on to perform. And when it does not come so easily, remember then that so many of us want to accomplish the same goals. You have a lot of company and support. Don't be shy about asking for assistance. Everyone needs it at one time or another, in one form or another. Who knows? Perhaps this time the child care situation you have found will be perfect for everyone concerned. We certainly hope so. Continue to lend your support to child care programs and to other parents everywhere who are striving to find the best choices for every child. We hope you will share this guide with a friend and write to share with us your experiences with *Choosing Child Care.*

Write to us care of:

CHOOSING CHILD CARE
Parents and Child Care Resources
1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

References

Publishers' addresses are listed in the Resources section.

BOOKS WITH MORE ADVICE AND SUPPORT FOR WORKING PARENTS

Benjamin, Lois. *So You Want to Be a Working Mother!* New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls. 1966. 141 pp.: 95¢.

Gold, Jane R. and Joan M. Bergstrom. *Checking Out Child Care: A Parent Guide.* Washington, DC: Day Care and Child Development Council of America. 1975. 28 pp.: 75¢.

Klein, Carole. *The Single Parent Experience.* New York, NY: Walker and Company. 1973. 241 pp.: $7.95.

Olds, Sally Wendkos. *The Mother Who Works Outside the Home.* New York, NY: Child Study Press. 1975. 79 pp.: $1.50.

Skelsey, Alice. *The Working Mother's Guide to Her Home, Her Family and Herself.* New York, NY: Random House, Inc. 1970. 247 pp.: $6.95.

Woolsey, Persia. *Creative Survival for Single Mothers.* Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts. 1975. 144 pp.: $4.95.

Young, Nancy, et al. *Momma Resources.* Venica, CA: Young/Hope. 1974. 55 pp.: $1.00.

MORE CHILD CARE INFORMATION

Child Care and Disabled Dependent Care, Internal Revenue Service. Washington, DC: Internal Revenue Service. Free. (IRS Publication No. 503.)

Day Care and Early Education: The Magazine of the Child-Growth Movement. New York, NY: Behavioral Publications. $1.50 per issue; $9.00 per individual subscription.

Day Care for Your Children, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. 1974. 14 pp. (DHEW Publication No. (OHD) 74-47.)

Day Care: What and Why, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. New York, NY: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. 1972. 10 pp.: free.

Day Care: Who Needs It? League of Women Voters Education Fund. Washington, DC: League of Women Voters Education Fund. 1973. 16 pp.: 35¢ per copy; 50 copies for $3.50.

Jorde, Paula. *Living & Learning with Children: A Handbook of Activities for Children from Three to Six.* Alamo, CA: Paula Jorde. 1975. 63 pp.: $2.25. (Available from author, 2050 Ridgewood Road, Alamo, CA 94507.)

Keyserling, Mary Dublin. *Windows on Day Care: A Report on the Findings of Members of the National Council of Jewish Women on Day Care Needs and Services in Their Communities.* New York, NY: National Council of Jewish Women. 1972. 248 pp.

LaCrosse, E. Robert. *Day Care for America's Children.* New York, NY: Public Affairs Committee, Inc. 1971. 24 pp.: 25¢.

Playgroups: Do It Ourselves Childcare, Childcare Switchboard/Single Parent Resource Center. San Francisco, CA: Childcare Switchboard/Single Parent Resource Center. 1975. 24 pp.: 75¢.

The Pocket Guide to Babysitting, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. 1974. 48 pp.: 70¢. (DHEW Publication No. (OHD) 74-45.)

Some Ways of Distinguishing a Good School or Center for Young Children, National Association for the Education of Young Children. Washington, DC: NAEYC. Free.

Resources

For more information on child care, you may want to write to these organizations. They have other publications you may want to read, too.

American Academy of Pediatrics
P.O. Box 1034
Evanston, IL 60204

American Home Economics Association
1600 - 20th Street NW
Washington, DC 20016

Association for Childhood Education International
3615 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20016

Behavioral Publications
72 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011

Black Child Development Institute, Inc.
1028 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 514
Washington, DC 20036

Childcare Switchboard/Single Parent Resource Center
3896 - 24th Street
San Francisco, CA 94114

Child Study Press
50 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10010

Day Care and Child Development Council of America, Inc.
1012 - 14th Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

Funk & Wagnalls
Executive Office
63 East 77th Street
New York, NY 10021

Internal Revenue Service

Publishing Branch
1111 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20224

League of Women Voters of the United States

1730 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

McGraw-Hill Book Company

1221 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company

Health and Welfare Division
Metropolitan Life Insurance Company
One Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10010

Momma

The Organization for Single Mothers
P.O. Box 5759
Santa Monica, CA 90405

The Newspaper/Magazine for Single Mothers
P.O. Box 567
Venice, CA 90291

National Association for the Education of Young Children

1834 Connecticut Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20009

National Congress of Parents and Teachers

700 North Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611

National Council of Jewish Women

One West 47th Street
New York, NY 10036

Office of Child Development

U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, DC 20013

Parent Cooperative Preschools International

1370 Canterbury Way
Rockville, MD 20854

Parents and Child Care Resources

1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Play School Association

120 West 57th Street
New York, NY 10019

Public Affairs Committee, Inc.

Public Affairs Pamphlets
Public Affairs Committee, Inc.
381 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

Random House, Inc.

201 East 50th Street
New York, NY 10022

Single Parent Resource Center (See Childcare Switchboard/ Single Parent Resource Center)

U.S. Government Printing Office

Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402

Walker and Company

720 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10019

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Credits

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We welcome readers' comments: write to *Parents and Child Care Resources.* (See Response Sheet on the last page.)

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REQUEST FOR READER RESPONSE

This booklet was prepared to assist you in your search for good child care arrangements. We hope it has been useful to you. We look forward to your comments. To assist us in revising and expanding the information we have presented, please answer the questions, using more paper, if necessary, to share your own experiences with other parents.

1. Was this booklet useful to you? Yes No
2. What parts or pages were of particular assistance?
3. Did you find a child care arrangement after you read the booklet? Yes No
4. What parts were not of value to you?
5. What should be added?
6. What should be omitted?
7. What information was new to you?
8. What kinds of experiences have you had with a sitter?
9. What kinds of experiences have you had with a playgroup?
10. What kinds of experiences have you had with a center?
11. What kinds of experiences have you had with a family day care home?
12. Other comments

CHOOSING CHILD CARE

Parents and Child Care Resources

1855 Folsom Street

San Francisco, CA 94103

Please fill in, cut out, fold in half, staple, and send back to us.

Thank you!

CHOOSING CHILD CARE

A unique guide to assist parents in selecting quality child care services.

Includes –

* Locating resources in your community
* Knowing the choices
* Checking out
  - sitters
  - homes
  - centers
  - other alternatives
* Sharing personal and practical advice
* References

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